

DAWNLESS NIGHT & WAKELESS DREAM



明けない夜とさめない夢

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My first year in middle school saw a first attempt at writing something resembling fiction. To use the term *something resembling fiction* already suggests prideful arrogance, a gross distortion from reality. If one had to say it, it was fiction-imitating nonsense.

'Twas the tale of a middle schooler possessed by words.

Someone who wanted to make clear the differences between Probability, Chance, Expected Value, Statistics, Hope and Possibility; finding a link between Jack, Jackal, Jangar and Jungle; measuring the difference between Faust, Falcon and Family; and likewise, divining a divisor between World, Society, Universe and Reality, down to fifty digits past the decimal point, those were the problems he devoted himself to. A laughable devotion, a desire to summarize everything under the sun, a belief that everything isn't comprised of molecules or matter, but lexicon. That's all there is to this middle schooler, all there is to this protagonist, all there is to this tale.

That's all there is to this story.

The manuscript's been long lost to time. Its hook, its ending, even the protagonist's name eludes memory. Perhaps the protagonist didn't have a name to begin with; regardless, the innumerable details of

this story have faded into nothing in my head. The only thing I can remember from the story was something the middle schooler protagonist said to his sister in third grade:

—I believe that, in the coming future, I will encounter a sequence of words so beautiful I will lay down my life for it without question. It's a promise, something I'm bound to, my duty, my destiny. It shall be six characters long, four of them kanji. I don't know what it will be yet, but I will know it once I see it.

A kid on the edge of puberty, who views theory as taking precedence over reality, such infantile misunderstandings springing from one's fantasies were documented in about thirty sheets, or about ten thousand characters. What was originally a Japanese class assignment ended up contrary to the author's expectations, getting quite the praise among the teachers. You have the potential to become a writer, said the comments; once it got read in class, the same adulation came from peers. But that was also the last attempt at writing fiction.

Two reasons for that:

First being, there were only three sheets of manuscript paper left. Whatever one can conjure out of three sheets doesn't even deserve to be called an exer-

cise or a draft. Plus, if one wanted to buy another sheaf, one would be better off buying another book. And besides, that was about the time when the Great Hanshin earthquake happened, which is to say the spare time to do so never happened.

The second reason's more difficult to say. Even if I left no stone unturned and gave every detail in my explanation, it'd still sound incomprehensible for those who can make friends. For those who don't understand what solitude is, or for those who do but wouldn't put themselves in that situation, what I'm about to say is something they can never hope to feel.

Though it is exceedingly easy to put into words:

It's about not taking praise well.

It is despairingly upsetting, like getting rudely awakened by an alarm clock in the morning. Of course, much as it upsets sleepy heads, waking people up from their slumber is precisely the job alarm clocks pride themselves in, so I don't plan on ranting about it in length. The senselessness in having one's hard work torn into shreds is something I'm familiar with through the part-time jobs in my student days.

Stop the 16-bit chime and shuffle off the bed. One hand scrawling the unkempt hair, one hand turning

the light on. No PCs, no TVs, all that meets the eye are coat hangers and a fridge, a taboo-like unsightliness afflicting this six-mat room (with a Western-style wooden floor). Then again, much as *taboo-like unsightliness* is about the usual state this room is in, the phrase itself only points to a specific area, and besides, that unsightliness itself has been ruined by the pile of books that'd been toppled over. All the scattered books number about three hundred volumes in total, supposing on average each being two hundred thousand characters long, that'd make this room have about sixty million characters. Yet that, too, isn't something special. That's all there is to it. However, *that's all there is to it* is a very, very important phrase, or at least, that's what I like to think.

One stretch, and off I go to the bathroom (an all-in-one unit), splashing cold water in my face. I might have left the comfort of the blanket with the alarm's beckoning, but I wasn't really that sleepy. I don't have problems like low blood pressure, so I've already gotten used to waking up at 7 a.m. on the dot over the past several years, alarm clock or not. Quite incredible, now that I think of it. Why did I even set an alarm last night in the first place?

Though compared to questions like that, breakfast

seems more pertinent. Open the fridge, take the nearest bottle with the nutritional tablets, open its lid, and start eating. Peach flavor today. Nice bit of luck. Citrus would've been dull. Though the question of flavor is an insignificant one, certainly not something with a potential to change one's life. I'm not the type to do character development via eating food, no thanks. Next, I grabbed the PET bottle on my bedside (Oolong tea), put it on my mouth, and drank about a hundred milliliters at once, swallowing the tablets. In the end, it was about five nutritional tablets in total. Breakfast complete. I walk to the window, ready to let some light in the room.

Pull away the curtain laces, then the curtains, then open the lock, then push the window out. And finally, the canopy, like peeling a lettuce layer by layer. Actually, the last time I peeled a lettuce was back in high school, and I don't have a clear memory of it; not that that's something worth pitying over, of course.

Something surprising came when I opened the canopy, though: what greeted my eyes wasn't a typical 7 a.m. midsummer Kyoto. Not a trace of the sun in the sky; what was there was a full moon to the east. Twinkling stars dotting the dark sky, light from the lamps flooding the streets down below, as

though day never left.

A hint of immediate suspicion punctuated the air, but I soon understood what was going on. I probably mixed a.m. and p.m. up, didn't I? When I was readying for college exams, so focused was I in revising that it disrupted the habitual schedule I grew up with, resulting in several of these *mistakes*. While now I see what's going on, a new question started occupying my thoughts. I should've gone to bed last night at 11 o'clock. Like my habit of waking up at 7 a.m., it hasn't changed one bit in years. Even if it has, it's only deviated by about plus or minus twenty minutes, within a certain margin of error. If this was me oversleeping, that meant I had already slept over twenty hours. Whichever way you put it, it beggars belief. So that'd mean I did wake up at 7 a.m.; that should be it.

If we follow this theory, there's only one plausible conclusion. It's still 7 in the morning, the sun's just taken a nap and hasn't bothered to rise up. Though it is unusual not to see the sun despite a clear sky, for me, it's more unusual to not wake up at 7 a.m. than it is to not see the sun at 7 a.m. It's probably the same for everyone, that one's own common sense takes precedence over the world's. Similar to assertive phrases such as an *endless rain* or a

springless winter, a description such as a *dawnless night* also exists, I see. But then, that means it is no longer a mere metaphorical literary device. That's fine. Not that the world is lacking in vocabulary; there are so many words it's annoying.

It's sickening.

It's sickening and unbearable, life.

But in the end, why didn't the sun rise? It's still incredible one way or another. If there was a TV, maybe I could reach the truth by watching the news or some other program; if there was a computer with internet access, I could get the latest real-time information. This is, after all, a *dawnless night*, a phenomenon which satiates the masses' psychological propensity towards bystandership and snobbery, and therefore would be instant front-page material. But I don't even have a newspaper subscription. No TVs, no PCs, not even a newspaper. When I put it to words, it sounds like I'm some jaded recluse, but it's not actually that rare to see. Most people who forsake their hometowns to go to college in the capital end up like this. The moment one perceives themselves as unique is the moment one sets themselves up for misery. This is an important lesson to take.

Ever since that first year in middle school, special things don't seem all that special any more. If I was still that first year middle schooler, someone who admires self-destruction, maybe I would think the life I'm living now has some meaning, but all of this is the result of idleness, of compromise.

The light in the room went off suddenly. Now that's a rare sight. As I blankly stared at this *dawnless night*, the phone rang. Like the alarm clock, it also played a 16-bit chime. I fumbled for the phone in that jacket on the floor (a prepaid, no texting), wondering who it could be. But of all the people I know, I can't think of any who'd ring me just past 7 in the morning. In the end, I finally found it inside the jacket pocket.

It's Asakura.

She says she's about to head out, reminding me that I shouldn't be late either. So that's it.

Now I finally remember why I set an alarm last night. Yes, it's the end of the month, the 30th. That's why I set the alarm before nodding off, as a preventative measure, just in case. But with these skies—this *weather*, I became clouded by hesitation on proceeding as planned.

—So what.

Said Asakura.

—It's not like it's raining.

It's as she said. It doesn't matter, that part's plain to see. Not a single cloud up there. The streets are lit with the bright moon and the stars. No, even without the moon and the stars, the streetlamps are all on. No typhoons, no rain, no flood or strong wind warnings; to say it doesn't matter isn't a misjudgement. So I told her I'm still going, and followed that up with some casual chit-chat before hanging up.

By the end of the phone call, it was 7:30. 7:30 a.m. What next... I told Asakura I'd meet her at noon. Even including transit, going out at 11 is already time plenty. I'm not the sort of youngster who takes ages picking out clothes and putting on makeup. I guess that means I have three and a half hours to kill, though I don't have anything worth killing time with. About all the three hundred books scattered on the floor I could recite cover-to-cover, and I'm not interested in rereading them either. Even though it's not a big deal if I threw them away, my idleness prevents me from doing so. Idleness and compromise, these are the two most important words that form my life. Even the habit of dozing off at 11 and waking up at 7 wasn't the result of some rule, but the product of idleness and shuffling my other activities around as a compromise. That's all there is

to it. Not throwing the books away is, ultimately, also a product of idleness and compromise. An intense fear of a completely unforeseen situation coming up if I did. But books I'm not interested in rereading are no different from trash, in the same way my humdrum life is no different from garbage. *Unread books* is an oxymoronic expression, a contradiction unto itself, illogical.

But either way, with no books to read, I don't have anything I can kill time with. I guess I have no choice but to stare out the window for three and a half hours. *Dawnless night*. A sight this rare is probably something one wouldn't get tired of even after a whole day, but in actuality, it took me less than half an hour to lose interest. Even if I keep staring, it's not like I'd become an astronomer. Even so, I glued myself to the window until the end.

Don't take well to praise, so I loathe reviews.

Hate it when anyone sets their sights on me, goodwill or ill-will.

Don't want to be part of any group.

But when you think about it, it's just like those college students who stubbornly refuse any source of information, be it the TV, the internet, or the newspaper, so it's not really something rare, some-

thing unique. Maybe some would find that shocking, but it really isn't something unheard of or out of the ordinary. Speaking of, back then, having just completed that fiction-resembling something, she wasn't as straight with me as she is now. If I had to say it, it's hilarious. She gets carried away really easily. It's a fault of hers that made her cautious and very timid. A kid you can see anywhere, someone ordinary, run-of-the-mill. If I had to sum her up in a sentence, she's the sort of model representative first year middle schooler of the era when people saw despair as a fashionable thing.

Despair.

A boring word.

Should be gotten rid of.

Exterminated.

Exert every last bit of energy, swing that sledgehammer, and crush it.

As soon as the clock ticked past 11, I left the room. Off to Kyoto Station on a bus. Although it's an easily bikeable journey, there aren't many places to park around the station. I'm a bit worried if the buses would still run in weather like this, but as it turns out, there was no need to. All the roads were still flowing with cars left, right, and center. The only

thing that's different were the headlights, the difference in number is negligible. Neither overflowing, nor desolate. Neither desolate nor overflowing. Vision is more or less impaired, but as Asakura said, it's not as bad as when it rains. If there's one thing one can find in Japan, it's people who use the weather as an excuse to walk back on an appointment. Wonder if that's for better or for worse.

Got on the punctual bus to Kyoto Station. Seventeen passengers total, but only three had their eyes on the dark morning sky. Even these three seem to be getting tired of it, averting their gaze from the window one by one.

Ah, so that's what it is. So long as there's no real harm done, humans don't care no matter what happens. No, the opposite is truer. That is, long as it doesn't cause any real harm unto oneself, humans would do anything. Silence is an admission of not caring while leaving room for some exceptions, that's all it is. Self-preservation rides roughshod over desire or curiosity. For the self, maintaining what is takes precedence over transforming into what shall be. No one wanted the sun to be there; in the short run, disrupting today's schedule would be a greater inconvenience. Is that a good thing or a bad thing...

Probably good, I think. At least it isn't bad.

Nothing wrong about it, nothing bad about it.
Nothing bad about it at all.

Really don't take well to praise.

Obviously, that doesn't mean I take well to criticism. I've lived a great number of seconds, but I've never met anyone who *likes being in the center of defamatory insults* or who *enjoys being despised*. I probably won't meet anyone like that either; not the type to seek out people like that.

That said, no matter who it is, one doesn't live life choosing likes or dislikes or choosing comfort over discomfort. One's values in life are only found in chaos and disorder. Until now, I've met my fair share of people who feel more at ease when left alone and shunned than when in the face of cheap praise or amity. Yes, there are plenty who treat misfortune and despair as their friends. There are also people who can only be described as born isolated. They may not expect people to dislike them, nor might they like being alone, they just simply feel more at ease in situations like that.

At ease.

Could that be a solution?

Perhaps that middle schooler protagonist who could only live in those thirty sheets of manuscript

paper would think differently about such loneliness, such isolation, such solitude.

However.

If there is any advice to be taken from that middle schooler possessed by words, it would be that this world defies pure verbal exposition. Words are nowhere near valuable enough to exchange for life. The only things explicable by such a low-level concept would be things like the ends of the earth, the extremities of reality, or the axioms of the world. But as to what the world is, no one knows.

Once at Kyoto Station, I walked up that endless flight of stairs up to the roof. Sat on the concrete bench, biting on a lollipop, one hand holding a bunkobon (a Sakyo Komatsu short stories collection), Asakura was already there, waiting. If she's meeting someone at 12, she'd be there by 11:30; if she's meeting someone at 11:30, she'd be there by 11, that's Asakura for you. Not twenty-nine minutes, not thirty-one minutes, she'd always arrive exactly thirty minutes early, it's her personal philosophy (or perhaps her challenging the conventions of time). But I'm not the sort of kind soul who'd arrive thirty minutes early because of that. There is a limit to everything, neither too much nor too little; such is relationships, such is life. That's my golden rule. She

wouldn't complain as long as I came before 12. Asakura isn't that unreasonable.

A miniskirt with a long-sleeved shirt; short hair. She may obsess over whether she gives off a clean and refreshing image, but that part doesn't come across with this flea-market-like getup. Can't tell if she cut her own hair. The length's uneven, and so is the texture. Not that it's a bad thing. She doesn't care whatever glances people throw at her. I may not have believed such a line of thought ever existed, but now I'm forced to admit that this kind of thought, along with people who hold this kind of thought, do indeed exist.

In other words, not caring about what other people think.

In other words, not caring about the state of the world.

She's a real recluse, unlike me who only pretends to be one. Having said that, she's not a misanthrope. Which is to say, Asakura's simply living life as she wants, freely, at her own leisure. Which is why, in the process of me mingling with her, I do get somewhat envious and jealous of her. But no matter how small this envy, this jealousy is, I can never let her know. I wish to stay equals with her. Not friends, equals.

—It's night.

Asakura sighed dejectedly, noticing me heading towards her. She's always been lackadaisical like that.

Yep. It's night, I nodded.

—It should be day, but it's night.

It should be day, but it's night.

—Why? The forecast said it's going to be clear skies today. I read it in the morning paper.

Weather forecasts are based on statistical models, so there is definitely room for error. Though with modern telemetry, for this big an error to happen, that's quite a rarity.

But compared to that, something else stood out to me more in Asakura's sentence. Since when did she have a newspaper subscription? The reason she has refused to consume any media, be it via TV or via computer, wasn't because she's lazy like me, but because she wills herself to.

—That part didn't change. But I do find the 4-koma they syndicate quite interesting.

Interesting?

—Yes, yes, like nonsensical masterpieces.

Nonsensical masterpiece is a catchphrase of Asakura's. No idea what it means; it probably doesn't mean anything. But, I would hear it from her at least once a month, sometimes three or four times.

I may still have no idea what it means, but it left an impression over time and I remember borrowing it on a few occasions, even. Bad habit of mine to be easily affected by the people around me.

—Not that it's a bad thing.

Asakura said, seemingly seeing through everything.

—Because you like me.

The value of existence.

To put it differently, purpose.

Whether one is cognizant of things like these doesn't change the fact that one is living on this planet. *Living a meaningless life is no different from dying* is a clichéd line in lousy tragedies, but if hackneyed expressions constitute our reality, then it wouldn't be the earth orbiting the sun, but the sun orbiting earth. Faith doesn't change anything. Wishes don't come true. Dreams have to end at some point.

To be easily affected by others would, to spin things positively, mean that person empathizes well with others; to spin things negatively, that person lacks autonomy, meaning they'll have to choose their friends carefully. Or perhaps people like that shouldn't make friends at all. He who touches pitch

shall be defiled. Mingle with great men, he gets educated; mingle with small men, he gets brainwashed. Then again, when it comes to people willing to be brainwashed, they certainly aren't a rare breed. To not choose or decide out of their own will, but *unwillingly* rely on everything and everyone around them. Like the feeling when picking a wedding gown, or the crow of fable, chasing flattery at all cost.

Yes—in that sense, the author who wrote that thirty-page manuscript, the ten thousand characters, should reckon calmness a paramount thing. To wrap tightly a sensation such as despair as if it were cloth, to avoid any excitement wherever she went. You can say she's embodying the second law of thermodynamics. Wouldn't Osamu Dazai's *criticism sparks anger in me, but praise makes me feel I've deceived the other's feelings* have to have been written in a state of complete tranquility? Ah... which is to say, the metaphor of forming a conclusion despite knowing how contrived it is would be absolute zero, a complete deadening.

Deadening.

Its antonym, *rebirth*.

—Though I wonder—could this be some bad omen?

Continued Asakura disinterestedly. She might have said it in jest, but if this *dawnless night* goes on, it would undoubtedly cast upon this earth, plus

upon humans and all other flora and fauna an undesirable effect. The first thing that comes to mind is the incapacitation of photosynthesis. If we're only talking about humankind, electricity use would skyrocket. There's plenty else, and to say the days are numbered for the grand spaceship that is earth wouldn't be wrong. No need to wait sixty centuries for humans to destroy the environment, humanity will be gone long before that.

Silently I gaze upon the sky. Full moon and constellations.

Beautiful.

Beautiful, but not of much worth.

—Maybe the sun's disappeared.

Said Asakura, which I immediately refuted. Leaving aside the twinkling stars, the brightly shining moon is proof enough that the sun was still there. The most sensible explanation would be some full eclipse caused by something as-yet-unknown. Going by possibilities, it could be that the earth stopped rotating, or even if it hasn't stopped, slowed down significantly; that should be it.

Whichever it is, it's an unforeseen stoppage.

—Not an impossibility. Be it Laplace's demon or Maxwell's demon, if we start from theories like those, we might end up with a nonzero probability.

Asakura spoke casually. She's probably uninterested. For someone as detached from the living as Asakura is, a dawnless night or a sunlight-less life makes little difference.

No, it's not just Asakura.

Looking down, the busy crowds don't look different, save for the street lighting. Drove of people move as they have always done. Everything's the same. Nothing's changed.

Which—that is, back on the topic of real harm.

As long as no real harm befalls oneself.

As long as it causes no real harm unto oneself.

Yes, it's that simple.

No one cares about what happens to others.

No one cares about what happens to this planet.

No one cares about what happens to me.

No one cares about what words people use.

Words are powerless.

Overwhelmingly powerless.

Words are violent.

Overwhelmingly violent.

Not only are words useless in getting to the truth, they occasionally wring upon this world something neither real nor fictitious. Humans are the only animals who possess the word. As such, by extension of this quirk, humans are also the only animals who

wield falsehood and honesty. For this world riddled with riots and war and fictions and bombs and belligerence and anxiety and pestilence and hypocrisy and procreation and concealment and deceit and ignorance and silence and flattery and destruction to be so cheery and peaceful; how disgusting. The masses see but refuse to acknowledge, trundling on in their uneventful lives. Watching them isn't just vomit-inducing, it's homicide-inducing. Every word in the *Kōjien*, even hundreds of times that many, wouldn't be enough to explain everything under the sun, not even close. It's always been this way; the realization that it will always be this way brings nothing but despair. The interpretation that Goethe's anecdotal last words, *mehr Licht!*, was him asking someone to open the curtains has become a rather well-known joke. Of course, the opposite has also happened in history. Like that story about the famously long-nosed Pinocchio; his bizarre name was ultimately an original figment of the author's imagination. History is rife with such examples. Disinherited words, misunderstood words. Words harming humankind, words scamming humankind.

What is there to it?

That's all there is to it.

Probability means probability, chance means

chance, expected value means expected value, statistics means statistics, hope means hope, prediction means prediction, and nothing else. It wouldn't be wrong to call loneliness, isolation, and solitude the same thing either. The act of comparison is itself a mistake. If a conclusion can't be made without comparison, that's mere evidence of the retardation of thought.

Comparative review.

A necessary mode of thinking, but meaningless when taken at face value. If one truly wishes to measure the meanings of words, one should restrict oneself to that most restrictive method, a penalty point system.

A middle schooler possessed by words.

One can't help but laugh.

What a low-level spirit to be haunted by.

Drive it away with a dictionary.

A few dictionaries are all you need.

—Speaking of, Ryūnosuke Akutagawa once made a curious observation. Since the sun doesn't revolve around the earth, it's even stranger that even with geocentrism refuted, we still talk about how the sun rises and sets. It'd be more accurate to say how many degrees the earth had spun.

I know that. It's from *Shuju no Kotoba*, more specifically from *Historical Materialism*. I read it when I was eight. In the section *Mysticism* of the same book, Ryūnosuke scathingly criticized his contemporaries by saying something like *everyone believes they're descended from apes when they haven't even read the Book of Genesis*. It was through that book that I learned of the geocentric model and evolution theory. Ryūnosuke Akutagawa only wrote *Shuju no Kotoba* having been influenced by *Bierce*. While not as bad as me, perhaps Ryūnosuke Akutagawa was also an easily influenceable character. And then he also has people he likes. Rather than saying I admire him unlike any other, I'm more modelling myself after him. But then again, someone who lacks empathy wouldn't be able to write stories for a living, and of course, they wouldn't commit suicide.

—Suicide, huh.

Interjected Asakura.

—That book also said *life is more hellish than hell*. Heh, all the good lines have been taken a long time ago. What a classic. Makes you want to quote the whole thing.

Life is nothing compared to a book. I forgot where that quote came from. Maybe someone else said it, maybe it was something I said. Nonetheless, it's a real

quote—*life is nothing compared to a book*. Like, for instance, those two gargantuan bookstores next to the Kyoto Station building, which must surely total a staggering hundreds of thousands of volumes. One single lifetime is nowhere near enough to peruse every single book—even if one only selects those to one's fancy, it still wouldn't be time enough, let alone counting the equally voluminous list of words in them.

Wouldn't it make things that little bit simpler.

Not an inadequacy in orthography.

But an inadequacy in vocabulary.

—It's about 1 p.m. now, but maybe the sun'll rise back up by night. The earth will have already rotated 180 degrees by then.

A belief that the sun will always be there. Anyone would think that. Humans become incredibly fragile in the face of the concept that is *taking something for granted*. Or as is more commonly known, a blindspot.

Speaking of which, I once saw a traffic light. Of course, this isn't a dig at the people who've never seen one in this modern age—the point being, I once saw a traffic light up close when the plane I was on landed. It's probably at the end of its life cycle or broken, so it was being repaired. Once it's on the ground, that traffic light that's served its purpose—

it's eerily massive. Since it was always dangling in the air, it's always been viewed from afar, so I never thought they'd be this big. To think that sort of perception has informed my daily life gives me the chills. I might not know why I shivered, but I shivered all the same.

Thinking back on it, the reason I shivered must have been because something I *took for granted* had been subverted. The same goes for when I opened the canopy this morning.

A denial of something *taken for granted*.

Then so what.

Just take what follows for granted.

One can take as many things for granted as one can.

The sun, gone?

Well, the moon's still there, so no big deal.

But, casting aside the powerlessness, the numberlessness, or being too low-level, words are certainly convenient. They're adaptable, flexible, and can easily blend in. Makes you wonder if a middle schooler possessed by words could be something inevitable.

Ah, that's not right, there's no point in such repetition. Wouldn't that protagonist still be a projection of its author? Which would mean that that wasn't

fiction, or something resembling fiction, or even fiction-imitating nonsense; it's the first year middle schooler who authored it. She herself. Like a diary, the self-portrait overflows. It's easy to summarize it as a product of youthful vigor, though saying that requires one to grow up sufficiently such that one recognizes it as all in the past.

—I believe that, in the coming future, I will encounter a sequence of words so beautiful I will lay down my life for it without question. It's a promise, something I'm bound to, my duty, my destiny. It shall be six characters long, four of them kanji. I don't know what it will be yet, but I will know it once I see it.

Haven't found those words yet.

Words.

The word *word* itself is a word.

—Then—it's about time I headed back.

About three hours of chit-chat later, it's 3 p.m. Asakura stood from the concrete bench.

—The evening paper's almost delivered to my place. Presumably the experts will talk about this phenomenon.

I see. As much of a hermit Asakura is, she still seems to be interested in what's in front of her.

—Mm. I notice you've grown your hair out.

Said Asakura, seemingly only noticing just now.

—You don't go to the barber's?

The mere thought of someone placing a blade near my head frightens me. Asakura should be the same as me in that regard. Which means she cut her own hair.

—Right. It's still better if you cut it. Long hair doesn't suit you. Makes you look untidy. Isn't it about time you got a job? Long hair doesn't suit anyone, guys or gals. So. What're you going to do?

The future—seemingly distant, but right in front of me.

Can't live in a kid's world forever.

That said, although I've always held that employment is something paramount. I don't have any qualifications or licenses (not even a TOEIC certificate or a driver's license), and whether I can graduate college is still not a given. When I retook exams in the latter part of term, I abandoned all the idleness and compromise I excelled at and attended all my classes, but once I slowed down, that me never came back. Right now, I'm at the point where I don't go to campus anymore except for exams. If this goes on, I'd probably repeat a year. This is a problem on a different dimension from that sun, a far more pressing issue.

First.

I thought.

First, try writing a novel.

—A novel? So you want to be a novelist? It's really taxing. The first step in becoming a recluse.

No, that's not what I meant. I just don't want to go find a job. I just—just want to write a story about a nonsense user.

—What's that?

A question I've always deliberately dodged. Ever since writing that fiction-imitating nonsense in middle school, I've always dodged it, took the long route. But it seems I can no longer keep dodging that question; the time has come to face it.

I lift my head up, gazing into the sky.

No sun there.

Things taken for granted don't always get granted.

The problem is, we will always find a way of acceptance.

Once what's taken for granted isn't anymore, take the next thing for granted. Who cares if the sun goes away, who cares if I forget writing that fiction-imitating nonsense, who cares if I lose trying to clean up the past. It's all acceptable. Just as a past king once said, we'd accept even a locked-up collar.

We'd always accept it.

And I hate that.

I despise that.

Cleaning up is necessary.

Even if it isn't constructive in the slightest.

The past is something to be cleaned up.

—Writing novels would only leave you with painful memories.

That's fine.

—You might end up not finding an ounce of happiness at all.

That's fine.

—You'll be compared against many others. That's what all this so-called performance is. Compared against your predecessors who now live in the history books, against contemporary geniuses, against the successors trying to catch up to you. Maybe it'll be unfair and you'd end up looking bad, maybe through sheer error you'd end up overrated. It's nauseating either way. Though I guess being compared to would be the most nauseating thing?

Nauseating indeed. But, it can't be helped. It's something inevitable, something unsolvable. Something unchangeable, nor does anyone possess the wherewithal to change it.

—Hmph. Never change. You still live by idleness and compromise. That's my review for you.

Gee, thanks.

—So, what kind of story will it be?

I think it'll be the tale of a middle schooler, possessed by words. A middle schooler who came of age, the tale of a nonsense user who leaves no comment on anything beyond words, and pursues that one particular sequence of words. To him, that inimitable sequence of words.

—Now where have I heard that story before.

That might be the case. This might not be a product of my will, but someone influencing me at some point in time, at some place. Like a marionette. Humans become influenced by someone else before they know it. No will of their own, all they do is follow others' orders. But even so, there's no change. No need to be roundabout. Taking the long way, taking the shortcut, neither suits my fancy. I'm not daft enough to think my words are only my own. But I will write down fictions that belong only to me. Slavishly.

—If you become a writer.

Said Asakura.

—Let me become your reader.

Thank you.

To put it as determination might feel too aloof. As if the story was an improvised one. But in reality, I never thought about if anyone would ask me a question like that. It's like that metaphor with the cat in a box. I know full well that dreams will stay dreams, that they'll never come true; it's why they're called dreams. The moment one starts dreaming, one is destined to wake up. That's what makes it a dream.

Just as a dawnless night is something never experienced, a wakeless dream doesn't exist.

The time of awakening will always dawn.

It may not be an unhappy end like getting awakened by an alarm clock, but, one day, very naturally, once found out, one will wake up, as one should. Though this has nothing to do with dreaming, but something more pressing. Because if one never wakes up, that means death.

Not self-destruction, but a suicide.

Not ruin, but obliteration.

Even that cat metaphor is a thought experiment that can only be established from a microscopic (or should I say macroscopic) perspective. Its conclusion, the truth itself, has already been ascertained before the box was opened. It is both a game of words and a game of numbers. Which is to say, that determination has been in me long ago. Eons ago. Or perhaps, yester-

day. Or perhaps, last year. Or perhaps, in that first year of middle school.

A dawnless night.

A wakeless dream.

Love it or loathe it, excelling at it or making a fool of it, that's not the point. Even though I don't take praise or criticism well, I still want to put myself out there; it's a contradiction I have to live with. But even if this wasn't the case, I still think I have the obligation to finish that tale about the middle schooler possessed by words.

Even until today, he's probably draped himself in despair. But he, and she, and them, they weren't despairing at all, they were anticipating with baited breath.

Anticipating what?

I don't know.

After parting ways with Asakura, I stopped by the bookstores in Kyoto Avanti on the way home. Bought four dictionaries: a Japanese dictionary, a katakana dictionary, a dictionary of colloquialisms, and a Japanese-English dictionary. ¥20,000 in total. Looks like I'm not buying anything else until next month. This is all obviously to prepare for writing that story about the nonsense user. Though I can't say it's on a

whim, it's always better to be prepared. In this day and age, writing out a manuscript by hand does feel outdated, so I need a word processor, but for that, I can just ask my younger sister back in the family home. She's already saying she wants a new computer, so I guess she wouldn't say no in lending it to me.

Now where have I heard that story before.

So went Asakura's evaluation.

This isn't just about the story of the nonsense user, but presumably about me. Me right now, the troubles I'm facing, the determination I'm having. Asakura probably heard the same things someplace else. And it's probably the same story for what I'm about to do. The moment one perceives themselves as unique is the moment one sets themselves up for misery—a very vital lesson to take. To throw away a goal and leave its conclusion to someone else is no different from having one's own dreams fulfilled by someone else. A bit like an archeological dig, or writing a history book, an act that leaves nothing for the future. Yes, in the same way that sunlight is worthless. They say the largest motivator for authors to become authors is something along the lines of *not finding the stories one wants to read*. How enviable. If one wants to read it, then all one has to do is to write it. How simple.

Which is why I'll write the things I want to write.

I can't not write.

Even if I have little idea what it is I will write.

Dictionaries in hand, I walked to the bus station. It's almost evening, but nothing in the sky's changed. The sun probably wouldn't rise at night like Asakura said. Then I guess all the remaining days are going to be night. Or maybe by tomorrow, the sun will rise back up, as if nothing happened.

Seems I've just missed the last one, since it's a quarter-hour wait. If I took a taxi, I'd already be back in those fifteen minutes, but sadly it's money I don't have. And the one time where time was so tight I had to hail a cab, when I told the driver my address, the driver responded, *No idea where that is. Any landmarks nearby you can name?* which deeply saddened me, so ever since then, no matter how tight time was, I never rode a cab. But if even a *dawnless night* can happen, then I guess fussing over *No idea where that is* is much ado about nothing.

The bus arrived exactly fifteen minutes later.

The first thing I did after going back home was wash away the sweat. Step out of the bathroom and stare out at the sky while blowing my hair dry. The full moon's already down past the other side of Mount Hiei. I can't help but wonder what the night

sky would look like, what with the moon dipping under the horizon during the day.

—This might not be a product of my will, but someone influencing me at some point in time, at some place. Like a marionette. Humans become influenced by someone else before they know it—so said I to Asakura.

I'm reminded of a well-known scene in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Having seen Romeo break through an easterly window, Juliet compares Romeo to the sun and herself to the moon. It is Romeo's existence that made it possible for her to shine for the first time. If the moon's still shining, that must mean the sun's still out there somewhere. Just like the aphorism *humans cannot live on their own*, any one person's existence is only made possible by the countless others surrounding them. To not make a decision out of one's own will, but *unwillingly* depend on others—couldn't this be used to explain the relationship between the sun and the moon? The moon lacks a will of its own, it's only there because of earth's gravitational pull and the sun's light. The food chain, the first rule of thermodynamics, Bierce begetting *Shuju no Kotoba*. Everything is connected to everything else in some inextricable way. Even without the medium of language.

That said, I'm not the sort of bard who asks themselves *who is my sun*. Not an astronomer, not a man of letters, I'm just me. People say those who look up to the sky and don't feel anything probably shouldn't be trusted with a pen; I see. Can't argue with that.

The sun.

The moon.

Two celestial bodies of vastly differing sizes that look about the same size thanks to their relative distances from us. A bit of trivia that was already learned back in science class in elementary school. The ratio between the distances from the earth to the sun and from the earth to the moon is near-identical to the ratio between the diameters of the sun and moon.

A sudden thought.

The *thing* that just dipped beneath the horizon wasn't actually the full moon, but the sun. A sudden drop in the sun's luminosity to the extent it matches the moon; if that's the case, that explains today's phenomenon. If that overall luminosity drops, then the stars would be out day and night. I held that thought as I looked towards the eastern sky. Anticipating the real moon to appear. But nothing came. No, consulting the almanac, today is indeed supposed to be a new moon. Though as someone who doesn't

stare at the sky every night, I guess I wouldn't have known. No, that's not it. If the sun's this dim, then surely the moon wouldn't show.

I picked up my phone and dialed Asakura's home number. If she didn't go the long route, she'd already be home by now, and if she's back home, that means she should've read the evening papers, and if she's read the evening papers, she should already understand the reason behind this phenomenon. Asakura picked up after four rings.

Said she.

—It's Sunday today.

Weather repeat is C.Q.F.D.

About the author (excerpted from the book)

Novelist. Winner of the 23rd Mephisto Prize for *Kubikiri Cycle: The Blue Savant and the Nonsense User* (Kodansha Novels) in 2002. Decisively emerging as one of the most popular writers of the “post-Seiryōin” era. Well-known in certain circles for his famously heartwarming episodes that belie his youth, such as sending the Gundam-loving editor a T-shirt, among others. Thing is, Mr. Nisio, I can’t wear it, because you gave me a size XL!

About the book

While Japan already has a sizable self-publication (*doujin*) scene, *Tandem Rotor Methodology* has gained a reputation as a highly sought-after work, having been out of print since its appearance at the inaugural 文学フリマ [*Bungaku Furima*] on November 2002. One look at the people involved and the reason becomes apparent: edited by Katsushi Ōta, with contributions from Yūya Satō, NISIOISIN, illustrations by Otarō Maijō and a striking cover artwork by the late Icco Sasai, it served as the direct predecessor to the literary magazine *Faust*, a fine historical specimen of the rapidly-changing Japanese popular literary scene in the early 2000s.

NISIOISIN

“Dawnless Night & Wakeless Dream”

(明けない夜とさめない夢 [*Akenai Yoru to Samenai Yume*])

originally published as part of

Tandem Rotor Methodology (タンデムローターの方法論 [*Tandemu Rōtā no Hōhōron*])

(ed. by Katsushi Ōta) (November 3, 2002, self-published, 68 pp.), pp. 29–58

Illustration and English title by Otarō Maijō

Translation	t-mars (Japanese to Chinese) (Feb. 2010) »sawa« (Chinese to English) (Jul. 2021)
Typesetting	»sawa«
Title page scan	109256
Dimensions	JIS B5 (257×182 mm)